DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 970 EC 132 472

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Pyecha, John N.; And Others |
| TITLE | A National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children. Volume I: Executive Summary. Final Report. |
| INSTITUTION | Research Triangle Inst., Durham, N.C. Center for Educational Research and Evaluation. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Special Education (ED), Washington, D.C. |
| BUREAU NO | RTI/1544/19-F |
| PUB DATE | Oct 80 |
| CONTRACT | 300-77-0529 |
| NOTE | 21p.; For related documents, see EC 132 473-478. |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Compliance (Legal); *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Exceptional Child Research; *Individualized Education Programs; National Surveys; State of the Art Reviews |

ABSTRACT

The first of seven volumes on a national survey of individualized education programs (IEPs) for handicapped children presents an overview of the research and a summary of the findings. Four basic objectives of the study are outlined: to identify factors associated with variations in the properties and contents of IEPs; to describe the target population, the type of special education services provided, and the process whereby IEPs are developed; to evaluate changes from one year to the next in significant aspects of the IEPs; and to examine the extent to which services provided coincide with those specified in the IEPs. Among findings from analysis of 2,657 IEPs in public schools and IEPs of 550 students in state/special facilities were that IEPs were in place for most handicapped students in the 1978-79 school year and that most of the IEPs contained the majority of the required elements; that IEPs had an average length of nearly five pages; that proposed evaluation criteria and a statement of the extent of participation in regular education were the mandated information areas included least frequently in IEPs; and that of the 96% of basic survey Ss who were enrolled in regular schools, only about 1% received all of their special education services in the regular classroom. The findings further indicated an increase in the average number of pages in an IEP, more short term objectives, and an improvement in the internal consistency of IEPs from the first to the second year. (CL)

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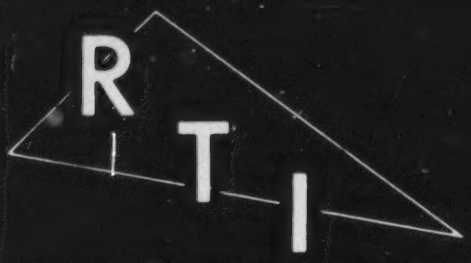

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RTI Project No. RTI/1544/-19 F

October 1980

ED199970

FINAL REPORT

# A NATIONAL SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPs) FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Volume I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EC 132172

Prepared for

Office of Special Education
U.S. Department of Education
under
Contract No. 300-77-0529



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Volume I

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EC 132 472

The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (now the Office of Special Education within the Department of Education), U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the project. Points of view and opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official U.S. Department of Education position or policy.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

FOREWARD

The study reported here is one of a series of studies commissioned by the Office of Special Education (formerly the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped) to describe the progress being made by state and local education agencies in implementing P.L. 94-142 and the challenges remaining.

The information in this report was gathered during the 1978-79 school year. For many districts that year marked the first year of full implementation of the Act. Many significant changes have been made by districts since that time. Still, this information suggests that tremendous efforts have been generated by state and local education agency personnel towards providing each handicapped student an individualized education program. Furthermore, these changes have come about in a very short period of time.

At the same time it is clear that there are remaining challenges in providing each handicapped child with an appropriate IEP. This report suggests certain points where policies may be unclear, or where practices may deviate from the ideals set forth in the Act. These findings are consistent with those of the monitoring visits made biannaually by Office of Special Education staff to each state participating in P.L. 94-142. Where such deviations have been found the Office of Special Education has worked with the states to clarify policies, has required that corrective actions be taken, and has required verification that prescribed corrective actions are made. In addition, the Office of Special Education has sponsored several technical assistance projects to assist state and local administrators in providing handicapped children with individualized education programs.

It is our hope that the findings from this study will assist state and local education agency personnel in examining their own policies any changes necessary to achieve the quality education services for all handicapped students that are the promise of P.L. 94-142.

## Preface and Acknowledgements

A National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children, the final report of the research conducted by the Research Triangle Institute under ED Contract Number 300-77-0529, is presented in five volumes:

Volume I, Executive Summary of Methodology and Major Findings

Volume II, Introduction, Methodology, and Instrumentation

Volume III, Findings for the Basic Survey

Volume IV, Findings for the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy

Volume V, Findings for the State/Special Facility Substudy.

Major study team members, who also were authors of this and one or more of the subsequent volumes, were:

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Valuable professional guidance was provided throughout the study by Drs. Linda Morra and Nancy Safer, Office of Special Education. Dr. Morra served as the OSE Project Officer during the design and data collection phases of the study; Dr. Safer served as the Project Officer during the report preparation phase.

The authors also wish to express their special appreciation for the cooperation and contributions of a number of other people, both within and outside the Research Triangle Institute, (RTI). These contributors are acknowledged in one or more of the subsequent volumes.

In addition, the authors would like to acknowledge the cooperation received from personnel at the state education agencies, local education agencies, and state/special facilities that participated in the survey.

Executive Summary

# A National Study of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background

Written Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for all handicapped children are required by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (as amended by P.L. 93-380 and P.L. 94-142). While the Act specifies the basic content required for the IEP and the basic procedures for its development, it leaves considerable discretion to the state and/or to the local school districts as to format and specificity. Because of potential variability in local implementation of the IEP mandate and because of its centrality to the Act, the Office of Special Education (OSE), ED, contracted with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to design and conduct a national survey of the properties and contents of IEPs.[1]

The contract to design and conduct the IEP survey was awarded in three one-year phases. The results of the first-year design phase were presented in the final report of Phase I activities.[2] Results of the activities conducted in Phases II and III are described in a five-volume report entitled, A National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children. This volume, Volume I, is an executive summary of that report. Volume II describes the background, objectives, methodology, and instrumentation for the IEP survey. Volume III describes the properties and contents of IEPs prepared for the target population of the Basic Survey. Volumes IV and V present the findings of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy and State/Special Facility Substudy, respectively.

### B. Objectives

Since little was known across the nation about the properties and contents of IEPs and the process whereby they are developed, the major objective of the national survey was to describe the properties and contents of IEPs prepared for a national sample of handicapped students in the 48 contiguous United States. To meet secondary objectives, the national survey was designed to: (1) identify those factors that are associated with variations in the properties and contents of IEPs; (2) provide descriptive information about the target population, the nature of and setting for the special education services provided to this population, and the process whereby IEPs are developed; (3) assess changes in significant properties of IEPs from one year to the next; and (4) provide insights into the extent to which the services actually provided to handicapped students coincide with those specified in their IEPs.

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1 U.S. Department of Education Contract No. 300-77-0529.

2 Pyecha, J. N., et al. Design of a National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children. Research Triangle Park, N.C.: Research Triangle Institute, November 1978.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The National Survey of IEPs consisted of a Basic Survey and two substudies: a State/Special Facility Substudy and a Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy.

### A. Basic Survey

The Basic Survey focused on the IEPs and characteristics of handicapped students in public schools administered by a local education agency (LEA), and on the type and service setting of the special educational services the students received (as specified in their IEPs).

The target population for the Basic Survey was all children in 47 of the 48 contiguous United States (New Mexico was excluded) and the District of Columbia who were, as of 1 December 1978: (1) between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive; (2) enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school administered by a local education agency; and (3) classified by their place of enrollment as being handicapped and receiving special education and related services.

Data collection for the Basic Survey involved photocopying the IEPs of, and obtaining related descriptive information for, 2,657 public school students from 507 schools in 208 school districts and 42 states. A trained survey specialist visited each of these schools and selected a sample of five to eight students, photocopied each student's IEP (deleting any personally identifiable information), distributed brief questionnaires to the school principal and to the teacher most knowledgeable about the development of each sample student's IEP, collected and scan-edited the completed questionnaires from the principal and teachers, and placed an ID number on each IEP and questionnaire. A questionnaire also was completed at the district level. These questionnaires provided information about the characteristics of the students and their special education programs, and about the schools and school districts in which they were enrolled.

### B. State/Special Facility Substudy

The State/Special Facility Substudy addressed questions similar to the Basic Survey questions but concerning handicapped students in state/special facilities (i.e., state-supported facilities, institutions receiving P.L. 89-313 funds, and other public and private schools that are not administered by LEAs). The target population for the State/Special Facility Substudy was all handicapped students enrolled in a state/special facility in 46 of the 48 contiguous United States and the District of Columbia (New Mexico and Nevada were excluded) who were, as of 1 December 1978, between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive.

The State/Special Facility Substudy was conducted in conjunction with the Basic Survey by including a sample of 550 students who were served in a total of 71 state/special facilities (approximately 8 students were selected from each facility). The procedures for collecting, processing, analyzing, and reporting data for the Basic Survey also were followed in this substudy. One exception was that the questionnaire for collecting information about school districts was not required.

C. Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy

The Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy, which consisted of two levels, was an exploratory substudy designed to provide insights into changes that occur over time in the properties and contents of IEPs. Level 1 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy addressed a question about changes that occur over two consecutive years (the 1977-78 and 1978-79 school years) in significant properties of IEPs that have been prepared within the same LEA. This first level involved a subsample of 796 of the 2,657 students included in the Basic Survey who had IEPs prepared by schools within the same LEA for two consecutive school years. This subsample included 432 of the 507 schools in the Basic Survey sample. The size of the Level 1 Substudy sample was adequate for computing national estimates to detect shifts of reasonable magnitude from one year to the next in the prevalence and characteristics of key properties of IEPs for the target population.

Level 2 of this substudy addressed answers to questions about: (1) the nature of the special education services actually received over two consecutive years; (2) the degree to which the type of services received coincided with those specified in IEPs; (3) the knowledge that students and their parents have about the IEPs; and (4) the type of personnel who participate in the development of IEPs. This level involved a subsample of 61 of the 796 students included in the Level 1 subsample. These 61 students were selected by taking one student from each of 61 sample schools in 25 LEAs. The small size of the subsample for the Level 2 Substudy did not permit sufficient precision for making national estimates of its findings. Nevertheless, the sample size was adequate for providing a general indication of the relationships that the substudy was designed to investigate.

Collection of data for the Level 1 and Level 2 Substudies was completed at each school in conjunction with the Basic Survey. For the Level 2 Substudy, however, it also was necesary to interview teachers and other relevant school personnel for information about the types of services each student in the sample received during the two-year time frame covered by the IEPs. Additional pertinent information was obtained by reviewing each student's school records, interviewing his/her parents, and studying his/her current special education program.

## III. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Major findings of the national survey indicate that in the 1978-79 school year IEPs were in place for most handicapped students, and that most of the IEPs contained the majority of required elements. These results suggest that school districts had moved quickly towards implementing the IEP provisions of P.L. 94-142. At the same time, it is clear that there are a number of areas in which IEPs can be improved. These areas, as well as other specific findings, are presented below in a brief response to each of the research questions posed for the Basic Survey, the State/Special Facility Substudy, and the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy.

Except for Level 2 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy, the descriptive measures used to answer these questions are estimates of population parameters that were computed from the weighted sample data. The estimated

standard errors associated with these population estimates also were computed and reported. Answers to the Level 2 Substudy are presented in terms of unweighted sample counts and proportions.

## A. Basic Survey and State/Special Facility Substudy

Eight general questions were addressed by the Basic Survey and State/Special Facility Substudy. These questions are presented below, along with a summary of the major findings regarding each. The results of the State/Special Facility Substudy are summarized primarily by presenting significant differences between the substudy and Basic Survey findings.

Also included are significant findings of analyses that were conducted to determine the extent to which certain properties and attributes of IEPs varied between student subpopulations defined by such factors as student age levels, type of school in which enrolled (regular versus special), severity of student handicap, and the size and per-pupil-expenditure levels of the school districts in which students were enrolled. In general, these analyses indicated some variation between subpopulations in the extent to which certain specific attributes or properties were found in IEPs; however, such variation was not consistent across a significant number of these attributes or properties.

### 1. What Are the Characteristics of the Students Who Have IEPs, and of the Schools, School Districts, and Facilities in Which They Are Enrolled?

#### a. Students

About three million handicapped students, ages 3-21, were estimated to be enrolled and receiving special education services in LEA-administered public elementary and secondary schools on 1 December 1978. Another 188,000 handicapped students, ages 3-21, were estimated to be enrolled and receiving services in state/special facilities on the same date. Ninety-five percent of the students in the Basic Survey, and 93 percent in the State/Special Facility Substudy, had IEPs.

General explanations for the nonavailability of IEPs were obtained for approximately one-half of the Basic Survey students for whom IEPs had not been prepared. These findings suggest a misunderstanding among some school personnel as to the intent of P.L. 94-142 that an IEP be prepared for all handicapped students prior to receiving special education and related services, regardless of the funding source for such services.

Handicapped students were distributed over the full range of the grade level, age, race, and sex classifications used in the study. Most of the handicapped students in the state/special facilities received their special education in ungraded classes, while very few of the Basic Survey students were served in this setting. Almost two-thirds of all the Basic Survey students were in the 6-12 age range; students in state/special facilities were fairly evenly distributed across the 6-12, 13-15, and 16-21 age ranges, with a smaller proportion in the 3-5 age range. More males than females were handicapped (by a factor of about 1.75 and 2.0 for Basic Survey and State/Special Facility students, respectively). Seventy-five percent of the Basic Survey students, and 83 percent of the State/Special Facility students, were

non-Hispanic whites; the percents of non-Hispanic blacks in these two groups were 19 and 13, respectively; and the percents of Hispanics were 4 and 3, respectively.

Eighty-four percent of the Basic Survey students had single handicaps, as compared to 49 percent for the State/Special Facility Substudy students. The majority of Basic Survey students were either learning disabled, speech impaired, or mentally retarded. Less than five percent of the Basic Survey students were included in any one of the remaining five classifications used in the study. Some differences were noted in these patterns of disability for different racial groups in the Basic Survey; e.g., the largest percents of whites and Hispanics were classified as learning disabled, whereas the largest percents of blacks and Indians were classified as mentally retarded. About half of the State/Special Facility students were mentally retarded, 18 percent were learning disabled, 28 percent were emotionally disturbed, 39 percent were speech impaired, and 22 percent were deaf or hard of hearing.

When Basic Survey students were classified by the severity of their handicaps, the approximate percents with mild, moderate, and severe handicaps were 51, 36, and 13, respectively. This ordering was reversed for students in state/special facilities; i.e., 58 percent of these students had severe handicaps, 36 percent had moderate handicaps, and 16 percent had mild handicaps.

b. Schools (Basic Survey Students)

Two percent of the schools that served handicapped students were classified as special schools, and four percent of the handicapped students with IEPs were enrolled in these special schools. The majority (about four-fifths) of all schools serving handicapped students were elementary schools; except for a small percent of elementary/secondary schools, the remaining schools were secondary schools.

About one-third of the schools were located in rural communities, followed by 27 percent in small cities, 21 percent in urban areas, and 18 percent in suburban areas. However, 21 percent of the national population of handicapped students were served in rural schools, followed by 22 percent in suburban schools, 28 percent in small city schools, and 29 percent in urban schools.

When schools were classified by the percent of their enrolled students who were handicapped, one-third of the regular schools had less than 6 percent of their enrolled students classified as handicapped, one-third had from 6 to 9 percent, and one-third had 10 percent or more of their students so classified.

c. School Districts (Basic Survey Students)

Just over three-fourths of the school districts enrolling handicapped students were small districts, whereas slightly less than 20 percent were medium-sized districts and 5 percent were large districts. However, only about one-fourth of all students with IEPs were enrolled in small districts; large and medium-sized districts enrolled 47 and 30 percent of the students with IEPs, respectively.

Twenty-five percent of all handicapped students were enrolled in school districts with a low annual per-pupil-expenditure level, 44 percent were

enrolled in districts that had a medium expenditure level, and 31 percent were enrolled in districts with a high expenditure level.

Three-fourths of all districts served some of their handicapped students through cooperative service arrangements, while 40 percent served all of their students under such arrangements. About four-fifths of the districts with cooperative arrangements were small districts. Forty percent of all districts contracted with private schools or institutions for the provision of special services to a portion of their students. Seven percent of the districts administered special schools (half of these districts were large districts).

d. Facilities (State/Special Facility Students)

About half of the state/special facilities were state operated or state supported. Two-thirds of the facilities were accredited by the SEA, and one-half were supervised by the SEA. About one-third provided educational services only; almost half provided day care or residential treatment that included educational services. Most of the facilities (64 percent) had a total enrollment of less than 50 students. Only seven percent had a total enrollment of 201 or more.

Slightly less than three-fourths of the facilities prepared IEPs primarily to meet the requirements of P.L. 94-142. Many facilities prepared IEPs with the intention of also meeting the requirements of other laws or mandates (e.g., P.L. 89-313).

2. What Do IEPs Look Like?

a. Basic Survey

IEPs had an average (mean) length of almost five pages; however, about half of all IEPs consisted of less than three and one-half pages. The majority were handwritten and virtually all were reasonably easy to read. IEPs for students enrolled in small districts consisted of fewer pages than those prepared for students in medium and large districts; IEPs for students enrolled in special schools were significantly longer than those of students enrolled in regular schools.

IEP formats contained headings for a variety of information. Many of these headings were related to information which, although not required by P.L. 94-142, was important to understanding the student's special needs and planned program. Headings for mandated information were found less frequently than expected, a finding that is significant because of the strong and direct relationship that was found between the inclusion of a heading in the IEP format and the provision of the information in the IEP.

Formats for about two-thirds of the IEPs tended to restrict the number of annual goals that could be listed, and almost 40 percent had a similar restriction for short-term objectives.

Three percent of the IEPs consisted of multiple documents that were either prepared by different teachers or service sources, or prepared as separate placement and implementation plans.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

State/Special Facility IEPs were longer than Basic Survey IEPs, having a mean length of eight pages and a median length of five pages. Fewer State/Special Facility IEPs than Basic Survey IEPs had formats that tended to restrict either the number of annual goals that could be listed (40 percent) or the number of short-term objectives that could be listed (20 percent).

3. What Kinds of Information Do IEPs Contain and How Is This Information Presented?

a. Basic Survey

A little more than one-third of the IEPs contained all of the 11 information items that the Act requires; about three-fourths contained 10 of the 11 mandated items, and 90 percent contained 7 of the 11 items.

Virtually all of the IEPs contained information about the specific educational services to be provided and the projected initiation date and anticipated duration of such services. The specific educational services to be provided were stated in, or inferred from, annual goals and/or short-term objectives. Information about related services generally was specified in the form of a listing of such services. The projected dates for initiation of specific services and the anticipated duration of such services usually were stated in reasonably precise terms.

All but a small percentage of the IEPs contained annual goals and/or short-term objectives. The mean number of goals listed in IEPs that had at least one annual goal was six, while the median was just over three. For objectives, the mean was 26 and the median was about 11. The mean number of annual goals and short-term objectives in IEPs from special schools were higher than the corresponding means for regular schools.

About 65 percent of the IEPs contained at least one short-term objective that was written in measurable terms, or otherwise included at least minimal criteria for evaluating whether the objectives were met. Approximately one-third of the objectives listed in an "average" IEP either were written in measurable terms or otherwise included evaluation criteria. There appeared to be a negative relationship between student age-levels and the percent of objectives in IEPs that were written in measurable terms (the average percent of objectives written in measurable terms decreased as student age increased). Also, the average IEP prepared for students in districts with a low level of per-pupil expenditure had a greater percent of its objectives written in measureable terms than did the average IEP prepared in medium-level districts.

The two mandated information areas that were included least frequently in IEPs were: (1) proposed evaluation criteria; and (2) a statement of the extent of participation in the regular education program. Information about proposed evaluation procedures, criteria, and schedules (including assurances of at least an annual evaluation) generally was not clearly stated, whereas statements as to the extent to which students would participate in regular education programs (or in special education programs) generally were explicitly stated, either as a proportion of time or in minutes, hours, or class periods. IEPs of students in the 3-5 age group, when compared to the other three age

groupings, less often contained a statement of the extent to which the student would participate in regular education programs. Also, a negative relationship was noted between school district per-pupil expenditure levels and the frequency with which IEPs contained a statement of the extent to which the student would be able to participate in the regular education program (i.e., the percent of IEPs containing at least one such statement decreased as the district per-pupil expenditure increased).

IEPs contained considerable nonmandated information, for example: basic student descriptors (age, race, sex, grade level, and type of handicap); information about the student's assessment, placement, general educational background, and proposed program of special services; and some documentation of the process whereby the student's IEP was developed, approved, and reviewed.

Though not required by the Act, about one-half of the IEPs that contained at least some present-level-of-performance information also contained at least some data (e.g., test scores) to support this information.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

State/Special Facility IEPs contained more annual goals than Basic Survey IEPs, with a mean of 11 and a median of 6.5. They also contained more short-term objectives, with a mean of 58 and a median of 25. A larger percent of the State/Special Facility IEPs included proposed evaluation criteria for these objectives.

5. Who Participates in the Development and Approval of IEPs?

a. Basic Survey

Based on information from the IEPs, a wide range of school personnel were involved in the development and approval of IEPs. Though these data provide a relatively good indicator of the types of personnel involved, they may not reflect all participants since the Act does not require that IEPs include either a listing or signatures of persons who participate in the development/approval process.

Slightly over 90 percent of the IEPs listed at least one participant, and slightly over 80 percent contained at least one signature. The average number of participants listed in IEPs that listed at least one participant was 4; a similar statistic for signers was 3.6.

Almost three-fourths of the IEPs listed at least one teacher or therapist as a participant, and 60 percent were signed by at least one teacher or therapist. Administrative personnel were indicated as participants in 60 percent of the IEPs and as signers in 50 percent. Ancillary personnel (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, and social workers) were listed as participants in about one-fourth of the IEPs, and as signers on about one-fifth. Parents (guardians/ surrogates) were reflected as participants on just under two-thirds, and as signers on just over one-half, of the IEPs. Students were rarely listed in the IEP as a participant or signer.

Just over one-third of all IEPs had all three of the mandated personnel categories (teachers, LEA administrative representatives, and parents or

guardians) listed as participants, while a slightly smaller percent had them listed as signers. Since persons with other specific titles (e.g., counselors) could have participated on IEP committees as LEA administrative representatives, these percents are probably underestimates.

Supplementary information obtained directly from the teachers most knowledgeable about the development of students' IEPs indicated that about three-fourths of the parents/guardians signed or verbally approved the IEP (less than one percent refused to approve the IEP because they considered it to be unacceptable), three-fourths discussed the completed IEP with school personnel, just over one-half met with the committee to discuss the completed IEP, and almost one-half provided inputs to the committee during the development of the IEP. Teachers also reported that slightly over one-third of the handicapped students discussed their IEPs with school personnel, and that ten percent provided input during the IEP development process.

When students were classified by the severity of their handicaps, the data were suggestive of three trends regarding the types of persons who participated in the development of IEPs: (1) greater participation by LEA representatives for students who are severely handicapped than for students who were mildly handicapped; (2) greater participation by parents of students with severe handicapping conditions than by parents of students with mild handicapping conditions; and (3) greater participation of at least one representative from each of the three mandated personnel categories on the IEP committees of severely handicapped students than on the committees of the mildly and moderately handicapped.

There was a definite trend of decreasing parent participation in development of the IEP as student age increased. The reverse was true for student participation in the development of IEPs (student participation increased as age increased). There was greater participation of counselors in the preparation of IEPs for the older students (ages 13-15 and 16-21) than for students in the 6-12 age range; and speech and language therapists participated more heavily in the development of IEPs for younger students (ages 3-5 and 6-12) than for the other two age levels.

Social workers, special education teachers, and speech and language therapists participated at higher rates in the development of IEPs in regular schools than in special schools, whereas a larger percent of physical or occupational therapists discussed completed IEPs with school personnel in regular schools than in special schools.

The rate at which teachers and therapists participated in the development of IEPs was significantly greater for students in school districts with a low level of per-pupil expenditure than for students in districts with a medium expenditure level. There was greater participation in the development of IEPs in medium-level districts than in low-level districts by "ancillary personnel." Within the category of ancillary personnel, significantly greater percents of the IEPs developed in medium- and high-level districts listed school psychologists as participants than did the IEPs developed in low-level districts.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

Fewer State/Special Facility IEPs than Basic Survey IEPs listed at least one partcipant and signer. However, the average number of participants

and signers for IEPs with at least one participant or signer did not differ for State/Special Facility and Basic Survey IEPs.

Each of the three major categories of facility personnel (teachers or therapists, administrative personnel, and ancillary personnel) were listed as participants in State/Special Facility IEPs less frequently than in Basic Survey IEPs. Also, fewer State/Special Facility IEPs listed at least one representative from all three of the mandated participant categories (parents, teacher, and LEA representative) than did Basic Survey IEPs.

6. What Types of Special Education and Related Services Are Specified in IEPs?

Generally, special education services were specified in IEPs in the form of statements of need, goals, and objectives, following the mandate provided by the law and regulations. Related services, on the other hand, most frequently were indicated in more general descriptive terms in some part of the document other than where needs, goals, and objectives were located. For purposes of describing the provision of special education services, thirteen different academic and functional areas were defined: (a) reading or oral or written Engish; (b) mathematics; (c) other academic; (d) social adaptation; (e) self-help skills; (f) emotional; (g) physical education; (h) motor skills; (i) speech; (j) visual acuity; (k) hearing; (l) vocational/prevocational; and (m) other.

a. Basic Survey

Assessment services, as reflected by a statement of present level of functioning, were indicated most often in the academic areas--about two-thirds of the IEPs indicated assessment services in reading or oral or written language, slightly more than one-half in mathematics, and about 40 percent in "other academic" areas. Present-level-of-functioning statements in social adaptation and speech, the two functional areas for which assessment services were most often indicated, were included in about one-third of the IEPs. Level-of-functioning information for motor skills was included in slightly under one-fourth of the IEPs, while such information for visual acuity and hearing each were included in about one-fifth of the IEPs. Although assessment information often was presented as statements of needs, many of the IEPs also included statements of strengths.

Based upon the use of annual goals and/or short-term objectives as indicators of the kinds of educational programming a student was to have received, IEPs across the nation reflected educational programming in all of the 13 academic/functional areas delineated for the survey. The extent to which IEPs contained educational programming in each of these 13 areas generally followed a pattern similar to that stated above for the provision of assessment services.

Except in the area of speech, a larger percentage of special school IEPs contained present-level-of-functioning information, annual goals, and short-term objectives in the various academic/functional areas than did regular school IEPs. Also, the higher the age level, the higher the percent of IEPs with at least one short-term objective for an academic area, and the lower the percent of IEPs with at least one short-term objective for the functional areas of motor skills or speech.

Thirteen percent of the IEPs listed one or more of the following related services (services are listed in descending order according to frequency of occurrence): transportation; medical services; counseling; psychological services; occupational therapy; physical therapy; social work service; audiology; parent counseling and training; and recreation. Most of the IEPs listed only one related service. More of the special-school students received one or more related services than did students in regular schools. Three related services (transportation, occupational therapy, and physical therapy) were specified more often in special school IEPs than in regular school IEPs.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

For about one-half of the 13 academic and functional areas considered in the study, present-level-of-functioning information was found more often in State/Special Facility IEPs than in Basic Survey IEPs. Statements of both needs and strengths were found more often in State/Special Facility IEPs than in Basic Survey IEPs.

In a majority of the academic and functional areas, a greater proportion of State/Special Facility IEPs than Basic Survey IEPs contained at least one annual goal and one short-term objective.

A greater percent of State/Special Facility IEPs (35 percent) than Basic Survey IEPs listed one or more related service. Seventeen percent listed only one related service, and 12 percent listed three or more. The services listed (in descending order of frequency) were: transportation, counseling, psychological services, audiology, physical therapy, recreation, and occupational therapy.

7. How Informative and Internally Consistent Are IEPs?

a. Basic Survey

Based on a global view of the IEPs, about 40 percent were both informative and internally consistent. While just over three-fourths of the documents met most of the requirements of the Act, only five percent were considered to be exceptionally informative and internally consistent.

The two major shortcomings of IEPs with respect to informativeness and internal consistency were the failure to (1) include all mandated information items, and (2) specify services to be provided (as reflected by annual goals and short-term objectives) which matched indicated needs. As stated earlier, only about one-third of the IEPs contained all of the information items mandated by the Act. With respect to the second shortcoming, about 71 percent of the IEPs included at least one incident of a goal statement that related to a short-term objective that related to an area of indicated need. However, many IEPs did not have goal statements and objectives specified for identified needs in specific academic and functional areas. For example, reading/English was the academic or functional area for which IEPs were most consistent (61 percent of the IEPs that had one of the three information items in this area had all three). Of the other nine areas studied, only speech and mathematics were complete and internally consistent in about one-half of the IEPs for which they were applicable. None of the remaining six areas were "complete" in more than 25 percent of the applicable IEPs.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

There were no meaningful significant differences between State/Special Facility IEPs and Basic Survey IEPs in regard to the informativeness and consistency of IEPs.

8. In What Service Setting, and for What Proportion of the Academic Week, Do Students Receive Special Education Services?

a. Basic Survey

Of the 96 percent of the Basic Survey students who were enrolled in regular schools (the other 4 percent were enrolled in special schools), only about one percent received all of their special education services in the regular classroom. Almost two-thirds of these students received special education services in the resource room only, followed by about one-fourth who received such services in a self-contained classroom only. Handicapped students assigned to resource rooms received about 5 hours of special education per week in that setting; those assigned to self-contained classrooms received about 20 hours of special education in that setting.

Students in the 3-5 year old group received their special education services more frequently in self-contained classrooms and less frequently in resource rooms than did the other age groups (6-12, 13-15, 16-21). The 3-5 and 6-12 age groups received fewer hours of special education per week in resource rooms than did students in the 13-15 and 16-21 age groups. Students in the 6-12 age group received more hours of special education per week in self-contained classrooms than did students in the other three age groupings.

A smaller percent of the severely handicapped students received all of their services in resource rooms only, when compared to the mildly and moderately handicapped students. There were no significant differences between severity levels with respect to: (1) the percents receiving all of their special education services in self-contained classrooms, and (2) the average number of hours of special education received in various settings.

Learning disabled and speech impaired students were more likely than students with other handicapping conditions to receive their special education in resource rooms. Mentally retarded, deaf and hard of hearing, and orthopedically impaired students were more likely to be served in self-contained classes.

A negative relationship was noted between district per-pupil expenditure levels and the percents of students who received their special education in resource rooms only. This relationship did not hold for those attending only self-contained classrooms; i.e., larger percents of students in high-level districts received their services in self-contained classes than did students in medium- and low-level districts.

There was some variation in the proportions of students who were reported to be receiving services in a combination of settings, with a suggested direct relationship between per-pupil expenditure levels and the percent of students receiving special education services in a combination of settings. If it can be inferred that placement in a combination of settings reflects the existence

and use of multiple placement options, these findings suggest that districts with higher per-pupil expenditures tend to have more placement options than do districts with lower per-pupil expenditures.

Only about two percent of all students in the Basic Survey population received a part of their special education on a pull-out basis in some setting other than their regular school.

b. State/Special Facility Substudy

This question was not included in the State/Special Facility Substudy since these facilities do not delineate service settings in terms of regular classrooms, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms.

B. Level 1 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy

As previously stated, the Level 1 Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy focused on changes that occurred over time in the properties and contents of IEPs. The major findings of this substudy, which are summarized below, indicate that the quality of IEPs improved from the first to the second year of the implementation of the P.L. 94-142 IEP requirements.

From the first to the second year there was a slight increase in the average number of pages in an IEP, an increase in the proportion of IEPs that provide a place for parental approval, and an increase in the proportion of IEPs that consisted of separate documents from different teachers or service sources. Second-year IEPs tended to (1) provide more headings for both mandated and nonmandated information and (2) be less restrictive in limiting the number of short-term objectives. There was an increase of almost 50 percent in the number of short-term objectives contained in the IEPs.

There was considerable improvement in the extent to which IEPs included the 11 items of information mandated by the Act. In particular, a larger proportion of current year IEPs included short-term objectives, evaluation criteria, evaluation procedures, evaluation schedules, and assurance of at least an annual evaluation. Also, there was a definite improvement in the internal consistency of IEPs, as indicated by the inclusion of both an annual goal and a short-term objective for at least one indicated area of need. There was some indication of a tendency toward including certain types of additional nonmandated information as well (e.g., student's age or birthdate, student's race, participants in the IEP process).

There were improvements in the second year IEPs from regular schools in the specificity of information regarding the projected date of initiation of services, proposed evaluation procedures, and assurance of at least an annual evaluation. In general, these improvements were not noted in IEPs from special schools.

A larger proportion of second-year IEPs showed participation in the development and approval processes by teachers and therapists, administrative personnel, and parents. This change occurred in regular school IEPs but not in IEPs from special schools.

Few changes were noted in the types of special education and related services specified in IEPs. There was a slight increase in the proportion of IEPs that contained need statements, goals, and objectives in the area of reading or oral or written English, and in the proportion of IEPs that contained goals and objectives in the areas of social adaptation and vocational/prevocational. However, no change was noted in the service settings in which special education services were provided, or in the proportion of the academic week that handicapped students spent in these settings.

C. Level 2 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy

The Level 2 Substudy was designed to gather information about: the nature of the special education and related services actually received by students in the subsample; the extent of overlap between these services and those specified in the IEPs; the extent to which parents (guardians) were knowledgeable about the IEPs of their children; and the types of personnel who were major contributors in the actual development of IEPs. Major findings in these areas are summarized below for the sample of 61 students included in this substudy.

A major finding of this substudy was that there was very close agreement between the actual special education programs received by students and the programs specified in the IEPs. This was true for both the first- and second-year IEPs. There appeared to be no attempt to promise services in the IEP with no intention of actually providing the service. Instead, the actual programs tended to be more comprehensive than the program outlined in the IEPs.

The assessment of the present level of functioning of students in the subsample consisted primarily of the administration of achievement tests or teacher-made tests. However, a fairly wide range of both academic and functional assessment techniques was used. Most assessments were conducted either at the end of the first year or at the beginning of the second year.

Most of the IEPs became effective either at the beginning of the school year (two-thirds) or at the beginning of the second half of the school year (15 percent). The ending date of service for almost all of the special education programs was the end of the school year. The special education programs reflected in these IEPs generally were directed toward meeting goals in reading or oral or written English and/or mathematics. Goals also were evaluated in social adaptation in about one-third of the IEPs and in speech in about 15 percent. Progress toward meeting short-term objectives was evaluated at least every six weeks in about half of the IEPs; for the remaining IEPs, the attainment of objectives was evaluated less often or no particular evaluation schedule was specified.

All of the parents were aware that their child had an IEP. Practically all of these parents were at least vaguely familiar with the contents of the IEP, at least one-third of these were at least somewhat familiar with the contents, and about one-fifth of the parents who were aware that their child had an IEP were thoroughly familiar with the contents. In general, parents were aware of their child's placement and the general services being provided. They were considerably less familiar with the annual goals and short-term objectives. Parents tended to be slightly less familiar with the contents of

the IEP than the teachers thought they were. There was a strong relationship between parental familiarity with IEPs and parental participation in the IEP process.

Most of the parents not only stated that their child was receiving the services specified in the IEP, but also expressed approval of the program.

For half of the students in the subsample, the teacher who provided the special education stated that he or she personally prepared the IEP which was later reviewed by the committee. For most of the balance of the IEPs, the teacher who provided the special education provided 50 percent or more of the inputs into the IEP. For one-fourth of the IEPs, the parents provided 10 percent or more of the inputs for the IEP. In most of the remaining cases, the parent did not participate at all in the actual IEP preparation. In a little more than 20 percent of the IEPs, psychologists and social workers frequently contributed 25 percent or more of the inputs for the IEPs; learning specialists/consultants, and regular classroom teachers contributed at this rate in just a few of the IEPs.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the National Survey of IEPs present a description of the IEPs developed for students, aged 3-21, who were receiving special education and related services in the second school year following the effective date of the IEP requirements of P.L. 94-142. State and local education agencies and state/special facilities appeared to have made a good start toward full implementation of the IEP mandate of P.L. 94-142. About 95 percent of the students receiving special education and related services had an IEP. About three-fourths of the IEPs contained 10 of the 11 mandated information items, and about 40 percent of them were considered to be at least reasonably informative and internally consistent. Many IEPs contained nonmandated information that generally made them more informative. A variety of services were specified in the IEPs, and a wide range of personnel were involved in the development and approval of these documents, including a significant proportion of parents (guardians/surrogates). Based on the findings of Level 1 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy, these accomplishments appear to reflect reasonable progress from the first to the second year of the implementation of P.L. 94-142, suggesting that the quality of IEPs improved as their developers became more proficient in writing them. The results of Level 2 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy indicate that IEPs clearly reflected the special education programs as actually implemented.

On the other hand, a significant proportion of IEPs did not contain: (a) all of the mandated information items, and/or (b) a direct link between areas of need and the services to be provided (as reflected by the annual goals and short-term objectives). Even under the generous criteria used in the study, only about one-third of the IEPs contained all the information mandated by the Act. Also, the educational programming information contained in IEPs raises some questions about the appropriateness of existing practices regarding assessment and the provision of services in the least restrictive environment.

Three sets of study findings have important implications for enhancing compliance with the IEP provision in P.L. 94-142 (and its supporting regulations),

especially with regard to improving the completeness and internal consistency of IEPs.

First, it is apparent that some school personnel may have misunderstood the intent of P.L. 94-142 that an IEP be prepared for all handicapped students, regardless of the funding source for the services they receive, and that the IEP be in effect before special education and related services are provided. This intent of the Act should be clarified and communicated to those responsible for preparing IEPs.[3]

Second, it is clear that there is a strong relationship between IEP format and content. As a result, more attention to formats, along with some monitoring of completed documents, should result in a significant improvement in the completeness and internal consistency of IEPs. For example, IEP formats should include specific headings for desired information, and these headings should be structured to promote internal consistency with respect to linking each specific academic/functional area in which a need is indicated to its associated goals and objectives. If the criteria and evaluation procedures for determining whether each short-term objective is achieved are not included in the objective (i.e., the objective is not stated in measurable terms), headings for this information also should be placed so that appropriate information can be linked directly to specific objectives.

Third, it is relatively clear from the patterns of variability examined in the study that the person(s) developing the IEP is (are) a key to the quality of the document. The importance of the training of the professionals responsible for educational programming and/or IEP development is certainly a major implication of the findings of the survey. Study findings indicate that such training should focus on improving the internal consistency of IEPs, and on specifying the evaluation procedures and criteria for determining the achievement of objectives. Evaluation procedures and criteria should be stated either as separate entities or as part of the statements of objectives.

These findings and conclusions provide a summary description or "snapshot" of IEPs for the 1978-79 school year. There is reason to believe, based on the improvement made from the 1977-78 school year to the 1978-79 school year, that this picture will continue to improve as state and local special educators become more experienced with the program, and as related federal policy is clarified. These findings, therefore, provide an important baseline for evaluating changes that occur over time in the properties and contents of IEPs, as well as for assessing the effectiveness of P.L. 94-142.

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[3] Useful in this regard is a policy paper (DAS Information Bulletin, Number 64, dated May 23, 1980) that recently was distributed by OSE to State Directors of Special Education, State Part B Coordinators, and State P.L. 89-313 Coordinators. This policy paper was written to respond to policy issues and concerns regarding the IEP requirements that have been raised over the past two years.